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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000012

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [ML](#)

SUBJECT: TALKS BETWEEN MALI AND TUAREG REBELS BREAK DOWN IN KIDAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 00003  
[B.](#) 08 BAMAKO 00932  
[C.](#) 08 BAMAKO 00968

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: Three days of Algerian brokered talks between the Malian government and Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) stalled on January 7 when the two sides failed to agree on whether ADC fighters should disarm before returning to their barracks in Kidal, or after. The failure was particularly remarkable given that the ADC's return to Kidal has been in the works for months and the meeting between Malian and ADC leaders in Kidal was originally promoted as a one-day, largely ceremonial symbol of support for the Algiers Accords. Instead, Mali, Algeria, and the ADC dealt a serious blow to the Accords framework and likely strengthened the man the meeting was supposed to isolate: dissident Tuareg rebel Ibrahim Bahanga. With Bahanga's forces prowling along the outskirts of Kidal and feelings of disillusionment - or worse - coursing through the ADC, this latest failure has the potential to trigger a new round of rebel attacks. On January 8 National Assembly Deputy and ADC leader Alghabass ag Intallah told the Embassy he had already spoken directly with President Amadou Toumani Toure and received assurances that Mali was working to resolve the impasse and reschedule the ADC's return to Kidal.

End Summary.

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A Failure to Communicate Leaves Accords in Doubt

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2.(C) A January 5 ceremony to welcome the ADC back to the town of Kidal turned into three days of failed negotiations between the Malian government and the Tuareg rebel ADC. After several false starts in Bamako, Mali's Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kafougouna Kone, and Chief of Defense, General Gabriel Poudiougou, finally flew to Kidal on the morning of January 5 aboard an Algerian aircraft along with ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali and Algeria's Ambassador to Mali (Ref. A). The Malian delegation and Algerian mediator, however, found themselves embroiled in controversy from the moment they touched down in Kidal due to a dispute over whether the ADC should disarm before entering the city or after settling into barracks within the city limits.

3.(C) The ADC left Kidal en masse in April 2008 following the still unsolved April 11 executions of two fellow Tuareg rebels. Its return to both Kidal and the Algiers Accords framework has been in the works since mid-November 2008 (Ref. B), if not earlier, and accelerated following Bahanga's late-December foray into Mali's central region of Segou (Ref. C). This renders the apparent confusion over the status of ADC weaponry that much more remarkable as it genuinely appears that no one noted the differences of opinion over

disarmament until the day of the actual return ceremony.

4.(C) As news of the impasse spread on January 5, an estimated 300 ADC members who had been camped on the outskirts of Kidal waiting for permission to enter the city folded their tents and returned to the ADC's mountain hide-out of Tegharghar. On January 6 the Algerian Ambassador and several senior ADC leaders traveled to Tegharghar in a last-ditch attempt to work out a compromise but returned to Kidal empty handed. Minister Kone, General Poudiougou, the Algerian Ambassador, and Iyad ag Ghali returned to Bamako on January 7. A Malian military source told the DATT that Minister Kone had been recalled due to concerns of a possible attack on Kidal by Tuareg rebel Ibrahim Bahanga, who is believed to be within 20 KM of the city. A Malian government official close to Minister Kone said the delegation was forced to return because Algeria wanted its aircraft back.

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Let the Blame Begin  
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5.(U) In Bamako, the tone of even the more measured local newspapers was noticeably sharper on January 8, often equating the ADC with Bahanga. "For the nth time," wrote the L'Indépendant, "Kidal's armed bandits have broken their word to Malian authorities. Once again, they have just revealed their bad faith. One more time, they have confirmed that they are not trustworthy. . . President Toure must act as the people hope he will. He needs to act to honor the army, to avoid supreme humiliation. . .The only language the armed bandits of Kidal understand is force. Go ahead, Mr.

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President. The people are with you in this fight." And from another newspaper, Le Malien: "Today more than ever, we know that they want neither peace nor the development of Kidal. They proved it on Monday afternoon (January 5), by refusing to accept the regular procedures for the return of a rebel or ex-rebel." Another article in Le Malien accused "western secret services, especially the French" of supporting Bahanga's Paris-based father-in-law Hama ag Sid'Ahmed. "While countries like Libya and Algeria encourage the peace process," wrote Le Malien, "it's the West that is sowing disorder."

6.(C) The Malian government, the Algerian mediators and some ADC leaders have tried to put a positive spin on what appears to be a major setback for the Algiers Accords process. Local and international press outlets have quoted various, mostly unnamed, officials as stating that the Accords steering committee continues to work toward the ADC's "immediate" return to Kidal and that both Mali and the ADC remain committed to a peaceful, negotiated resolution. Privately, however, Malian officials have questioned the ADC's commitment to peace. On January 7 a Malian government source told the Embassy that Mali thought ADC members had agreed to disarm prior to entering Kidal but that the ADC experienced a change of heart after forces aligned with dissident Tuareg rebel Ibrahim Bahanga materialized not far from Kidal. Bahanga's presence may have also altered Malian calculations, leading Mali to wonder if it would effectively be placing its own army between Bahanga on one side and ADC rebels on the other were it to let an armed ADC enter Kidal.

7.(C) A Tuareg source provided a different account, stating that no discussion of disarming outside of Kidal ever took place and that the Malian government had moved the proverbial goal posts by demanding that the ADC disarm before entering Kidal. The same source noted that the last time Tuareg rebels returned to barracks in Kidal - on March 9, 2007, in advance of the 2007 Kidal Forum - disarmament did not occur until two days later, on March 11. The ADC was also apparently unsettled by the number of Malian military patrols around Kidal during the first week of January. It is unclear whether ADC members expected disarmament to occur within days

after their return to Kidal as it did in March 2007, or whether the ADC intended to hold on to its weaponry until rebels were reintegrated into existing Malian army units or newly created mixed ones.

8.(C) On January 8 National Assembly Deputy and newly emergent ADC leader Alghabass ag Intallah told the Embassy that he had telephoned President Toure directly from Kidal following Minister Kone's departure. According to ag Intallah, President Toure attributed the flap over disarmament to a miscommunication and asked ag Intallah to inform the ADC's rank and file that Mali remained committed to the Accords and was working to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. Ag Intallah indicated that he personally believed the confusion over the ADC's weaponry was the product of an internal dispute within the Malian military over whether to allow armed Tuaregs back into Kidal. Ag Intallah, ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi, and Kidal Regional Assembly president Intahmadou ag Albachir left Kidal shortly after speaking with the Embassy to meet with the rest of the ADC in Tegharghar.

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Comment: One Step Closer to Rebellion  
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9.(C) The January 5 ceremony was intended as an unequivocal statement of Mali and the ADC's support for peace and the Algiers Accords. Had the ADC's return to Kidal proceeded as planned, it would have helped re-establish the ADC's role as the legitimate representative of Tuareg rebels, re-asserted the ADC's commitment to a peaceful settlement, and further isolated Bahanga. Instead, Mali, Algeria, and the ADC's joint failure conveyed the exact opposition message, with Mali questioning the ADC's commitment to peace and the ADC accusing Mali of once again moving the goal posts at the last moment. Given the stakes and the amount of time that went into planning this meeting, it is difficult to fathom how participants could have simply overlooked the question of ADC disarmament. The upshot is that by refusing to let the ADC enter Kidal, Mali may have just pushed the ADC closer to Bahanga. Meanwhile, by refusing to lay down their arms just a few kilometers outside of Kidal and enter the city, the ADC just blurred the lines between Tuareg rebels who remain dedicated to seeking peace, and those who do not. The apparent winner, unfortunately, is the one person who refused to participate at all: Ibrahim Bahanga.

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